NUMB. LX.

The GUARDIAN.

Nihil legebat quod non excerperet. Plin. Epist.

Wednesday, May 20. 1713.

To NESTOR IRONSIDE, *Esq;*

SIR,

'THERE is nothing in which Men deceive themselves more ridiculously, than in the Point of Reading, and which, as it's commonly practised, under the Notion of Improvement, has less Advantage. The generality of Readers, who are pleased with wandring over a number of Books almost at the same Instant, or if confined to one, who pursue the Author with much Hurry and Impatience to his last Page, must without doubt be allowed to be notable Digesters. This unsettled way of Reading, naturally seduces us into as undetermined a manner of Thinking, which unprofitably fatigues the Imagination, when a continued Chain of Thought would probably produce inestimable Conclusions. All Authors are eligible either for their Matter or Stile; if for the first, the Elucidation and Disposition of it into proper Lights, ought to employ a judicious Reader; if for the last, he ought to observe how some common Words are started into a new Signification, how such Epithets are beautifully reconciled to things that seemed incompatible, and must often remember the whole Structure of Period, because by the least Transposition, that Assemblage of Words which is called a Stile, becomes utterly annihilated. The swift Dispatch of common Readers not only eludes their Memory, but betrays their Apprehension, when the Turn of Thought and Expression would insensibly grow natural to them, would they but give themselves time to receive the Impression. Suppose we fix one of these Readers in his easie Chair, and observe him passing thro' a Book with a grave ruminating Face, how ridiculously must he look, if we desire him to give an Account of an Author he has just read over, and how unheeded must the general Character of it be, when given by one of these Serene Unobservers? The common Defence of these People is, that they have no design in Reading but for Pleasure, which I think should rather arise from the Reflection and Remembrance of what one has read, than from the transient Satisfaction of what one does, and we should be pleased proportionably as we are profited. 'Tis prodigious Arrogance in any one to imagine, that by one hasty course thro' a Book he can fully enter into the Soul and Secrets of a Writer, whose Life perhaps has been busied in the Birth of such Production. Books that don't immediately concern some Profession or Science, are generally run over as meer empty Entertainments, rather than as matter of Improvement; though in my Opinion, a refined Speculation upon Morality, or History, requires as much Time and Capacity to collect and digest, as the most abstruse Treatise of any Profession; and, I think besides, there can be no Book well written, but what must necessarily improve the Understanding of the Reader, even in the very Profession to which he applies himself. For to Reason with Strength, and express himself with Propriety, must equally concern the Divine, the Physician, and the Lawyer. My own course of looking into Books has occasioned these Reflections, and the following Account may suggest more.

'Having been bred up under a Relation that had a pretty large Study of Books, it became my Province once a Week to dust them. In the performance of this my Duty, as I was obliged to take down every particular Book, I thought there was no way to deceive the Toil of my Journey thro' the different Abodes and Habitations of these Authors, but by reading something in every one of them; and in this manner to make my Passage easie from the comely *Folio* in the upper Shelf or Region, even through the Crowd of *Duodecimo's* in the lower. By frequent Exercise I became so great a Proficient in this transitory Application to Books, that I could hold open half a dozen small Authors in an Hand, grasping them with as secure a dexterity as a Drawer does his Glasses, and feasting my curious Eye with all of them at the same Instant. Through these Methods the natural Irresolution of my Youth was much strengthened, and having no leisure, if I had had Inclination, to make pertinent Observations in Writing, I was thus confirmed a very early Wanderer. When I was sent to *Oxford* my chiefest Expence run upon Books, and my only

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(Price Two Pence.)